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(54) Title: A DATA INFORMATION SYSTEM

(57) Abstract

A data information system uses a record carrier (1) for use with issuers A-C having issuance terminals (2). The record carrier is provided by a provider (Z). The card has a plurality of tracks (10-12) each track being capable of supporting "buckets" of data indicative of an issuer A-C and of an event, e.g., credit points, associated with the issuer A-C. The event data is correlated with issuer data at redeemer stations (X, Y), each redeemer station having a reader (5) arranged to correlate the number of credit points with a particular issuer. The invention also discloses an arrangement for writing data to the record carrier and for reading data from the record carrier, and also a data information system incorporating the same. Furthermore the invention discloses a device for cleaning the record carrier which may be in the form of a credit card or the like.

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A DATA INFORMATION SYSTEM

5 Background of the Invention

This invention relates to a record carrier for storing data from a plurality of write means, to an arrangement for writing data to the record carrier, to a reader for the record carrier, to a data information system using the 10 record carrier, and to a method of conveying data information using the record carrier.

Field of the Invention

In recent times, it has been customary to offer 15 incentives to customers and potential customers, in an endeavour to retain or obtain their loyalty to a particular product, or to a particular vendor. Foremost amongst these loyalty-incentive schemes have been trading stamps, where the purchaser of goods receives a quantity of the trading 20 stamps related to the value of the purchases made.

The trading stamps were collected, and stuck into books which were then exchanged for goods. Trading stamps have a number of disadvantages. In particular, due to their adhesive quality, they are not easy for either the 25 customer or the vendor to keep, especially in damp conditions. From the vendor's point of view, trading stamps are bulky, difficult to handle and their fraudulent use is not easy to prevent. From the customer's point of view, the stamps are difficult to handle when out of their 30 book, and the large number of stamps necessary to obtain a substantial value for redemption are cumbersome.

A similar scheme, used frequently in the United Kingdom in association with petrol stations, concerns the issuing of collectable vouchers related to the value of 35 purchases made. Such vouchers are collected and exchanged,

usually at the point of issue, for a narrow range of articles.

Systems using magnetic cards which store information representative of a value are also known in the art. A 5 first type of magnetic card system, used for example in telephone systems, requires the user to buy a card which contains information corresponding to a "full" state. As the card is used, for example, for making a telephone call, the information content on the card is changed to indicate 10 the amount of use which has taken place. Finally the information stored on the card indicates to the apparatus with which the card is being used that the card is "empty", and usage of the telephone or other facility is thereupon terminated. Such cards are usually magnetic-stripe cards, 15 although other types of cards have been proposed. The magnetic-stripe cards have the advantages of being light and small, as well as being cheap to manufacture.

There are also card systems in use, consisting of magnetic-stripe cards, and card-write means and card-read 20 means at a number of different locations. The systems are analogous to the collectable tokens system in that credits are made to a card of a purchaser, the amount of credit being related to the value of a purchase made. When the card has been credited to a value corresponding to the 25 "full" state of the card, the card is exchanged for an item of a predetermined value, such as a gift token. In a known system the "full" cards are sent to a central control location, together with written information indicating the identity of the card holder. The item returned to the card 30 holder is also sent, for instance by post. Systems of this type are relatively expensive to operate and require either pre-payment for the credits to be issued or only a single credit issuer organisation. This is because there is no way of indicating the source of credits on a particular 35 card and thus no way of reconciling credits issued by a

particular issue with credits redeemed.

According to a first aspect of this invention there is provided a record carrier storing data from a plurality of write means, said record carrier including a storage area 5 capable of adaptive configuration by said plurality of write means whereby said data in said area is representative of and discerns each said write means and is representative of an event associated with each said write means.

10 Preferably said data comprises identifying data indicative of the identity of a respective write means and event data indicative of an event associated with the respective write means.

15 Conveniently said event data is representative of a numerical value.

Advantageously the event data for each identified write means is stored as a total numerical value for said each identified write means.

20 Conveniently the event data for all of the identified write means is stored in said storage area as a total separately from said event data for each identified write means.

25 Advantageously said data further comprises record carrier identifying data, distinctive of the record carrier.

Conveniently the record carrier is of substantially credit-card dimensions.

Advantageously data are stored on magnetic tracks.

According to a second aspect of this invention there 30 is provided an arrangement for writing data to a non visibly readable record carrier, comprising means for providing identifying data indicative of the said arrangement, means for providing event data representative of an event associated with said arrangement, and write 35 means for writing a data portion including said identifying

data and said event data to said record carrier such that the data portion indicates the event data and the arrangement writing said data portion.

Advantageously said write means writes to said record carrier one or more times.

Preferably said event data is representative of a numerical value.

In a preferred embodiment the arrangement comprises a record carrier reader for providing read data corresponding to data stored on an associated record carrier, and a detector for evaluating said read data, the output of the detector controlling the write means.

Conveniently the detector determines the total numerical value of all previously stored event data on said record carrier and provides a control signal for inhibiting said write means if the total value exceeds a predetermined value.

Advantageously the detector detects the number of previously stored data portions on said recorder carrier and provides a control signal for inhibiting said write means if said number exceeds a predetermined number.

Preferably the detector detects previously stored identifying data in said read data, and said arrangement further comprises comparison means for comparing said previously stored identifying data with said identifying data indicative of the arrangement of concern, whereby if no previously stored data portion includes identifying data indicative of said arrangement, then said write means writes a new data portion to said record carrier, said new data portion comprising identifying data indicative of said arrangement and event data associated with said arrangement.

Advantageously the detector is arranged to detect previously stored event data of said previously stored data portions and if a stored data portion includes identifying

data indicative of said arrangement, the said write means writes a data total representative of the sum of:

(a) the new numerical value of said event data associated with said arrangement; and

5 (b) the numerical value of said previously stored event data to that portion in place of said previously stored event data.

Conveniently the arrangement further comprises means for determining the number of data portions to be written 10 to said record carrier, and control means responsive to the said number for controlling said write means whereby said number of times of writing said data portions depends on the number of data portions.

Preferably stored data portions and, if applicable, a 15 new data portion are written afresh to said record carrier whereby data portions representative of data having higher numerical values of event data are presented for reading before data portions having lower numerical values of event data.

20 Advantageously the arrangement has discriminator means for discrimination of data portions to be written to said record carrier into first data portions having identifying data exhibiting a first characteristic and second said data portions having identifying data exhibiting a second 25 characteristic and format control means, responsive to the total number of data portions to be written to said recorder carrier and operable if the total number of data portions exceeds a predetermined threshold to cause said write means to write to said record carrier only event data 30 from a first said data portion, and to write to said record carrier said second data portions including identifying data and event data.

Conveniently said event data associated with said arrangement is written to memory means associated with said 35 arrangement substantially contemporaneously with writing

said data to said record carrier.

Advantageously a keyboard is provided for input of said event data to said arrangement.

Conveniently said record carrier is of substantially 5 credit card dimension.

Preferably data are stored in magnetic tracks on said record carrier.

According to a third aspect of the present invention there is provided an arrangement for accessing a record 10 carrier, having means for providing identifying data representative of the said arrangement, means for providing event data representative of a numerical value, record carrier reader means for providing read data corresponding to data previously stored on said record carrier, write 15 means for writing to said record carrier data comprising a data portion including said identifying data and said event data, such that the data portion indicates the event data and the arrangement writing said data portion, and processor means responsive to said read data for 20 controlling said write means to write said data portion as a new data portion if said read data does not include a data portion having identifying data representative of the said arrangement.

Preferably said write means is controllable by said 25 processor means to write said data portion to said record carrier one or more times.

Advantageously said processor means determines the number of times to write said data portion in dependence upon the number of previously stored data portions found in 30 said read data.

According to a fourth aspect of this invention there is provided a reader for a record carrier embodying data input by one or more write means, said data comprising identifying data representative of said write means and 35 event data indicative of an event recorded by said write

means, said reader including means for reading said identifying data, means for reading said event data and means for correlating said identifying data and event data associated therewith.

5 Preferably the reader comprises means for storing said correlated identifying data and event data.

Conveniently the reader further comprises data communication means for transmitting said correlated identifying and event data to data processor means.

10 According to a fifth aspect of this invention there is provided a data information system comprising two or more record carrier write means, each record carrier write means being adapted to write identifying data representative of said record carrier write means and event 15 data indicative of an event onto a record carrier provided in operation, and record carrier read means for evaluating from said record carrier said identifying data and said event data.

According to a sixth aspect of this invention there is 20 provided a method of conveying data information utilising a plurality of read-write arrangements, each comprising means for providing identifying data indicative of the respective read-write arrangement, means for providing event data to the respective read-write arrangement, said 25 event data being indicative of an event associated with the respective arrangement and at least one record carrier evaluator, comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing at least one record carrier;
- (b) bringing said record carrier into co- 30 operation with a respective read-write arrangement;
- (c) writing a data portion to said record carrier, said data portion comprising said identifying data and said event data;
- (d) bringing said record carrier into co- 35 operation with a record carrier evaluator;

(e) evaluating data written to said record carrier; and

5 (f) correlating said identifying data with said event data so as to identify the read/write arrangement with which said event was associated.

Preferably step (c) comprises writing said data portion one or more times.

Advantageously step (b) further comprises:

- 10 1. reading said record carrier;
2. determining whether said carrier embodies previous data portions comprising identifying data indicative of a read/write arrangement;
3. storing each said previous data portion in said read/write arrangement; and
- 15 4. step (c) further comprises writing said stored data portions to said record carrier.

Conveniently the method further comprises the steps of:

20 counting the number of data portions to be written to a record carrier and in dependence thereon, controlling said number of times of writing said data portion.

25 Preferably in the method, if said counted number of data portions is below a first threshold, said write means is controlled to write said data portions twice, and if said counted number is above said first threshold, said write means is controlled to write said data portion once.

Advantageously the method further comprises the steps of:

30 discriminating the data portions to be written to said record carrier into first data portions having identifying data exhibiting a first characteristic and second data portions having identifying data exhibiting a second characteristic; and

35 in dependence on the counted number of data portions to be written to a record carrier, writing said second data

portions to said record carrier and, from a first data portion, writing only event data to said record carrier.

Advantageously said event data represents a numerical value and in step (e) data portions are written to said record carrier with data portions representing numerical values of event data of higher value being presented on said record carrier before said portions representing lower numerical value.

Conveniently said record carrier is a magnetic-stripe card.

A Brief Description of the Drawings

The invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 shows a schematic diagram of a data information system in accordance with an aspect of the invention;

Figures 2(a) to 2(c) show a record carrying card in accordance with another aspect of this invention in which the Figures show formats of data stored on the record carrying card at different stages of use;

Figure 3(a) shows a schematic diagram of an arrangement for writing data in accordance with a further aspect of this invention;

Figure 3(b) shows a schematic view of a keyboard for use with the arrangement for writing data;

Figure 4 shows a schematic diagram of a reader for a record carrier;

Figure 5 shows the arrangement for writing data in combination with an electronic point of sale (EPOS) terminal;

Figure 6 shows the arrangement for writing data in combination with a data processor unit; and

In the Figures, like reference numerals indicate like parts.

The data information system shown in Figure 1 has first, second and third issuers A, B and C, normally at different locations, which each have stocks of "empty" cards 1 furnished by a card provider Z. The issuers each 5 have a respective arrangement for writing data, each arrangement comprising one or more credit issuance terminals 2. Where the arrangement comprises more than one terminal, the terminals may be dispersed, for instance distributed among premises of the issuer in different 10 locations, eg cities, towns. In the currently described preferred embodiment, the cards are three-track magnetic stripe cards, known per se. First and second redeemers X and Y have card value readers 4 and readers for record carriers hereinafter called card control readers 5. A card 15 provider effects central control using a data processor 6 coupled via data channels 7 and 8 to respect card readers 5.

As a customer completes a first transaction on the premises of one of the credit issuers A, B, C, the customer 20 will be given a new card 1 with a data portion (101, 102 in Figure 2(a)-(c)) written to it having data representative of the identity of the one credit issuer (identifying data 101) and a numerical value representative of credit points (event data 102) made by that issuer. Alternatively the 25 customer will provide a card already in his possession to the issuer so that the issuer can write that data portion to the card. The identifying data in the presently described embodiment consists of an account number representative of the issuer of concern. Data which 30 includes the identifying data of a credit issuer together with the amount of credit (event data) input by that issuer is written to the card in a unit termed herein a "bucket". As will be described later herein, a data portion written to the card may be a single bucket, or plural buckets.

35 In the presently described embodiment, such event data

includes data on the first and last transaction entered by a credit issuer of concern. This data includes the time and date of the first and last transaction entered by the credit issuer, and data identifying the specific credit 5 issuance terminals where those first and last transactions were entered. Where only one transaction has been entered by the credit issuer, the first and last transactions are coterminous and written accordingly. The last transaction is updated when a second or subsequent transaction is 10 entered by the same issuer.

Each time a transaction is made, information on the card is read off the card, and re-written to the card including any updating data.

Depending on the number of credit issuers who have 15 entered information to the card, the information stored on the card is held in different formats. As the card is credited by more and more credit issuers, the format of the data is adapted to allow for the higher data quantities involved whilst retaining storage security, as far as 20 possible. In this respect;

a. As shown in Figure 2(a) for the first few credit issuers visited, data portions written to the card have buckets 101, 102 repeated to achieve multiple redundancy using two tracks 10, 12 of the three tracks 10, 11, 12 on 25 the card. For example, for 1-4 credit issuers visited, the data portion for each issuer has four buckets. On each of the two tracks used for storing buckets, the buckets are written in a first order (A, B, C, D) and then the information repeated in a second order of the buckets (D, 30 C, B, A) the second order being a mirror-image of the first order. This helps to overcome problems caused by physical damage to the magnetic stripe, as later described herein.

b. When a first threshold number of credit issuers is visited but less than a second threshold number of 35 credit issuers, e.g., 5-8 credit issuers, then the data

portions already written on the card are read off, as described above, and buckets making up data portions are re-written only once per track on the two bucket-storage tracks 10, 12 of the card, with each data portion having 5 one bucket in each of the tracks, i.e., the buckets associated with issuer A-H are written once onto track 10 and once onto track 12. Track 11 referred to as the "redemption track" does not store buckets (as shown in Figure 2(b)). In this case the arrangement of buckets on 10 bucket-storage track 12 is maintained as a mirror-image of the arrangement of buckets on the track 10.

c. If the second higher threshold number of credit issuers is exceeded, redundancy can no longer be achieved and buckets are only stored once, each bucket being 15 presented on a single track only as shown in Figure 2(c). In other words, the data portion for each issuer has a single bucket.

In the presently described embodiment, the redemption track, track 11 of the card stores data termed "redemption data", including the total value of the credit held on the 20 card, the total value of the credit issued by prepaying credit issuers, described later herein, and data identifying the specific credit issuance terminal last visited and a security number.

25 The redemption track 11, further holds so-called "fixed data", which does not vary with the value of transactions. The fixed data includes a unique identifier for the card, data identifying the credit issuance terminal at which the card was first used, together with the time 30 and date of that use, and also data identifying the latest credit issuance terminal used for a transaction, with the time and date of that transaction. Thus certain of the fixed data is updated upon each transaction. Fixed data is also held on both the bucket-storage tracks 10, 12, 35 although if the card is used for large numbers of credit

issuers, the fixed data on one bucket-storage track 12 may be sacrificed if required while retaining two copies of fixed data on the other bucket-storage track and the redemption track, to provide redundancy.

5 It has been found advantageous to rank the respective buckets according to the numerical value of credit points they represent. Each time credits are made to a card the bucket with the highest numerical value of credit points on the card is written in a position on the card whereby that 10 value will be read first by a reader, and is followed by successive buckets representative of a descending order of credit points. For the case where only a few issuers appear on the card (enabling the use of redundancy as described above) the "mirror-image" presentation allows the 15 card to be read from either direction while at the same time ensuring that the highest value bucket (A) is read first.

Cards may become physically damaged, for instance by a key or coin scratch across the magnetic stripe, and this 20 would normally result in data loss. However the method described above using redundancy provides a high degree of data security against such damage.

Two types of credit issuers are envisaged in the system, namely pre-paying credit issuers who pay the card 25 redeemer in advance for a number of credits to be made to cards, and post-paying credit issuers who pay in arrears according to the actual number of credits which they have actually entered onto cards. To differentiate between pre-paying issuers and post-paying issuers, a separate data bit 30 could be used, but in the presently described preferred embodiment, the different account numbers of the credit issuers are used. To avoid the need for each credit issuance terminal carrying out extensive checks on identifying data from a card of concern, pre-paying and 35 post-paying issuers have accounts numbered in separate

numerical regions, for instance account numbers below 500 being for pre-paying issuers, and those above 500 for post-paying issuers. It is essential for the card redeemer accurately to ascertain the amount of credit entered by 5 each post-paying credit issuer so as to charge them correctly. Hence buckets from post-paying credit issuers are stored securely in that they are retained in full on the card until redemption. If a card is used at a sufficient number of credit issuers that the card becomes 10 filled with buckets from post-paying issuers, a subsequent attempt to add a new bucket will result in rejection of the card by the terminal, as described later herein.

It may be useful for the card provider to be able to detect how much credit was issued by each pre-paying credit 15 issuer e.g., for market information purposes. To this end, buckets from pre-paying issuers are stored on respective cards until a first predetermined number of credit issuers, e.g. 9 issuers, appears on the card. A card used at only a small number of credit issuers thus retains buckets from 20 both post-paying and pre-paying credit issuers. However, once a card has more than the first predetermined number of issuer entries, the buckets of pre-paying issuers are sacrificed one by one as necessary to make space for buckets from post-paying issuers. The total of pre-paid 25 credit points is already held on the card on the redemption track 11, and thus the customer's credit remains the same regardless of such bucket sacrifices. Once a second predetermined number of credit issuers, e.g. 17 issuers, appears on the card, no buckets of prepaying issuers are 30 stored, as such buckets will all have been sacrificed.

Analysis of the habits of consumers has shown that under normal day to day conditions only a few credit issuers will be visited during the life of a particular 35 card. This is particularly true where the maximum credit

storable on a card is low, as is preferred. Thus although the system as a whole may have a large number of credit issuers, cards need only cater for a relatively small number, for example between ten and thirty issuers.

5 Figure 3(a) shows a schematic diagram of an arrangement for writing data to a record carrier, the arrangement comprising a single credit-issuance terminal. It will of course be understood that an arrangement for writing data may include plural such terminals. In such a
10 multi-terminal arrangement, each terminal will write the same arrangement-identifying data to associated cards, and may also write data representative of the specific terminal of the plurality, as described above herein.

 The single terminal of the presently described
15 embodiment consists of a card reader/writer 21 coupled via a communication channel 201 to a processing unit 22. The processing unit is linked via a data channel 203 to a memory 23. The processing unit 22 is coupled via a further data channel 204 to a customer display unit 24, and via yet
20 a further data channel 205 to an operator module 25 having an operator display 26 and a keypad 27. A data bus 206 may also be connected to the processing unit 22, the bus 206 allowing the credit-issuance terminal to cooperate with other devices (described later herein with reference to
25 Figures 5 and 6).

 The keyboard for the credit issuance terminal is shown in Figure 3(b) and has numerical keys 31, control keys 32, e.g., "ENTER", "DELETE", and three code keys 33, described later herein.

30 In use the customer display 24 is positioned to be visible to a customer. When no card is in the terminal 21 the processing unit 22 may provide customer display messages, preferably so that over a period of time the whole display is activated. This draws the attention of
35 the customer to the display and conveys messages to him,

while at the same time providing a test of the display.

The operation of the credit issuance terminal 2 will now be described in greater detail.

When a customer has made one or more purchases and 5 wishes to have a corresponding amount of credit entered to a card, card 1 is inserted into a slot on the credit-issuance terminal 2 so as to associate it with the card reader/writer 21. If the card was previously unused, the issuance terminal detects this and writes a unique 10 identifier to the card to initialise it for use. If the card has been previously used, the card reader/writer 21 is controlled by the processing unit 22 via channel 201 to read information held on the card 1. The processing unit detects the data read by the reader/writer 21 and carries 15 out various checks, for instance to check the card identifier for validity and also to ensure that the card does not carry the full capacity of credit for such a card as described later herein. If the card is indeed full, then the credit issuance terminal will reject the card. If 20 the card is acceptable to the terminal, information from the card is transferred to temporary storage of the processing unit 22. As previously discussed this information includes the identity and amount of credit already made to the card by post-paying credit issuers, 25 derived from the or each bucket of the data portions entered by such issuers, information on pre-paying credit issuer transactions, the card unique identifier, the total amount of credit on the card and the total amount of pre-paid credit on the card, together with time information of 30 transactions. The customer display 24 shows the total amount of credit already on the card 1. If the credit issuance terminal 2 is a stand-alone device, then an operator will key in using the numeric keys 31 shown in Figure 3(b) the value of the purchase made and also may use 35 one or more of the code keys 33 to indicate the type of

transaction which has been made. The number and type of code keys and their method of use depend on the type of transactions of interest. For example, if the credit issuance terminal 2 is situated at a petrol filling station, five code keys 33 could be used, representing the fact that the majority of the purchase value was in respect of leaded petrol, unleaded petrol, diesel fuel, other vehicle-based purchases and food or confectionery, respectively. Alternatively, the code keys 33 may be used as tariff keys to set the amount of credit given for a particular value of purchase inputted by using the numeric keys 31. In this event, only three code (tariff) keys might be used, the first representing a first rate of credit per unit value of purchase, the second representing double the first and the third representing treble the first. The code or tariff keys may also be arranged to selectively issue a standard amount of credit.

It is also envisaged that if the application demands, the operator could key in a number of credit points directly, although this is not a preferred feature.

Having entered details of the value of the transaction or the amount of credit by the numeric keys 31, and the nature of the transaction by the code keys 33, the operator uses the control keys 32 to enter the information to the temporary storage of the processing unit 22. If the present issuer is a post-paying issuer, the processing unit 22 examines the data now held in temporary storage to check that:-

a. the present credit issuer is an issuer one of whose outlets has been visited before (i.e., that a data portion from the card has issuer identifying data corresponding to the identifying data of the present credit issuer), or that sufficient card capacity would exist to enter a new data portion consisting of at least one bucket,

b. that the total credit existing on the card added to the credit about to be issued by the credit issuance terminal will not exceed the maximum capacity of the card.

5 If the credit issuance terminal of the post-paying issuer finds that a data portion therefor has not previously been entered on the card and that the card lacks the capacity for such a new data portion, for example if 27 credit issuers appear on the card, the customer display
10 will produce a message advising the customer that although the card does not contain the maximum possible credit for the card, further credits can only be made at an outlet of an issuer already having a data portion on the card. The display will then advise the operator to insert a new card,
15 and the relevant credit may be entered to such a new card.

The card has a predetermined maximum credit capacity and if the card has insufficient capacity remaining for the amount of credit to be made, then an amount of credit sufficient to completely fill the card to the predetermined
20 maximum is made, this amount being decremented from the total amount to be credited at the particular transaction. The remaining amount to be credited is then applied to a further card or further cards for the customer concerned.

If the credit issuance terminal is able to credit to
25 the card of concern then the relevant amount of credit is added to the event data for the card, either adding to the total of a data portion already existing or assembling the data for a new data portion. The data portion are ranked
30 in descending order of credit and are written to the card with the number of buckets relevant to the number of credit issuers concerned, as described above. At the same time the running total of credit points on the card and, if appropriate, the number of credit points entered by pre-paid issuers is updated by the issuance terminal for
35 writing to the card. Furthermore, relevant items of fixed

data and the redemption data, described above herein, are updated by the terminal so that the present terminal identity will be recorded as the latest terminal visited.

5 If the processing unit 22 of the credit issuance terminal detects that more than the first predetermined number (mentioned above) of credit issuers have entries for the card, then data portions for pre-paying issuers are sacrificed as necessary, the pre-paying issuer information being retained as a sub-total.

10 If the present issuer is pre-paying, then not all of the above steps may be needed. However, in that case, the terminal will increment the pre-paying total data on the card as well as the overall total event data by the amount credited.

15 At substantially the same time as the information is re-written to the card 1 associated with the reader/writer 21, the data from the current transaction, including the amount of credit, the card identifier and the time of the transaction are transferred to the memory 23. This data 20 may be accessed by the processor 22 for checking, as later described.

Each issuance terminal is pre-loaded with a predetermined number of credit points. The credit points of an issuance terminal are set by a loading card issued by 25 the card provider and physically taken to an issuance terminal 2. The loading card is inserted into the reader/writer 21 of an issuance terminal to enable the terminal to issue a predetermined amount of credit points by "filling up" a portion of the memory 23 on the credit 30 issuance terminal with unallocated points. The processing unit 22 recognises that the loading card is such a card, and transfers the credit points data to the memory 23. While inserted into the issuance machine, the loading card also acquires from the credit issuance terminal 35 information, stored in the memory of the issuance terminal,

relating to transactions made since the last loading operation. The processor 26 of the terminal is programmed to carry out credibility checks on transactions made, for example the amounts of credit. It also checks other 5 factors, for example whether repeated credits have been made to the same card. Data concerning over-high or repeated credits are output from the credit issuance terminal to the loading card. In the presently described embodiment, the loading card is returned to the provider 10 for reading the information obtained from the issuance terminal in a card control reader 5 of the provider. However, it would be possible for the information downloaded onto the loading card to be read-off by a similar card control reader held by the credit issuer 15 himself.

Once a suitable amount of credit has been made to the card 1 the customer takes the card to a card redeemer X, for purchase or part-purchase of goods or services.

At the card redeemer X, Y the card 1 is read by a card 20 value reader 4 to ascertain the amount of credit points on the card and the credit points redeemed. In the preferred embodiment, the unique identifier of the card is read and stored to prevent re-use of the credit, but such fraud could be prevented in other ways, for instance by setting 25 an indicator on the card.

As the card is read by the card value reader 4 a customer display similar to that on the credit issuance terminal 2 shows the number of credit points available on the card, and also the monetary value associated with those 30 points. Preferably the card value reader 4 is operatively connected to an electronic point of sale (EPOS) unit. Such a connection allows the customer to use the card directly as part or full payment for items purchased from the redeemer.

35 The record-carrying card is retained by the card-

redeemer X so as to allow the information stored on the card to be accessed by the card control reader 5. The card control reader 5 shown in Figure 5 may be a separate card reader located on the premises of the card redeemer, or may 5 be integrated with the card value reader. It is also possible that the card control reader 5 may be situated remotely from the card value reader 4, for example, at a single central control location, but this arrangement is not preferred.

10 The card-control reader 5 has a card-reader 501 coupled via bus 502 to a processor module 503. The processor module 503 is in turn connected via a communication path 504 to the data processor 6. When a card 1 has been redeemed, it is read in the card reader 15 501. Data from the card is transferred over bus 502 to the processor module 503 for evaluation. The processor module 503 has a buffer store for the evaluated data, and periodically the contents of the buffer store are transmitted over the communication path 504 to the data 20 processor 6. The data processor is connected via further communication channels 505 to other card control readers 5. The nature of the communications paths 504, 505 is appropriate to the separation between the data processor and the card control readers 5, and could be radio links, 25 land lines, or optical fibres, for instance. In the processor module 503 the data read from the card 1 is checked for self-consistency. To this end the credit points from each stored data portion are totalled, and, if appropriate, added to the pre-paid credit total and the 30 resultant is compared with the total value of points stored on the card. The values of credit points in each stored data portion are then added to the appropriate respective running totals for each credit issuer held in the buffer storage area of the processor module 503.

35 As mentioned above the credit issuance terminal 2 may

be associated with other devices.

In the arrangement of Figure 5, the terminal 2 is coupled to an EPOS terminal 50, making the actions to operate the credit issuance terminal less complex. The 5 card is introduced into the slot on the credit issuance terminal, and the customer display indicates the same information as previously. However, when the purchase has been completed the EPOS terminal 50 automatically sends the credit data to the processing unit without the need for the 10 operator to input this data manually by the keyboard. The credit points may be transferred to the card, and to the internal memory of the terminal, either by using the enter key on the keypad, or in response to a stimulus from the EPOS terminal 50 itself.

15 A further arrangement is shown in Figure 6 which enables the credit issuance terminals to be remote from the point of sale, but coupled to a local data processor 60. In this arrangement the operation is as follows:-

Upon making a purchase at a first point of sale 20 device, a purchaser's card is passed through a local card reader to identify the particular card and the amount of credit points to be added which information is fed to the remote data processor 60. The purchaser may then make further purchases at other points of sale, each time 25 passing his card through respective point of sale card readers. Once all purchases have been completed, the card is taken to a remote credit issuance terminal where the total of credits made is entered onto the card for the processor 60.

30 In both of the arrangements shown in Figure 5 and 6 it may not always be strictly necessary for the credit issuance terminal to maintain its own memory for transactions made, since the data processor unit or the EPOS terminal itself may be capable of assuming the 35 function of storage of the transactions.

The bus 206 also allows the credit issuer to obtain information on the transactions of the credit issuance terminal. To this end, an analyser device, for example, a 5 laptop computer 207, may be coupled to the bus 206. The information from the memory 23 is then downloaded for analysis, e.g., for recognising fraudulent use of the terminal.

As described above, the record-carrier is a magnetic-stripe type card, but the invention is not to be limited thereto. In this respect other types of machine-readable carriers could alternatively be used, e.g. smart cards and optical cards. Also, although Figure 1 was described using only three issuers it will now be understood the invention 15 is not limited thereto.

CLAIMS:

- 5 1. A record carrier storing data from a plurality of write means (2), said record carrier (1) including a storage area (10, 11, 12) capable of adaptive configuration by said plurality of write means whereby said data (101, 102) in said area is representative of and discerns each 10 said write means (12) and is representative of an event associated with each said write means (2).
2. A record carrier according to claim 1 wherein said data comprises identifying data (101) indicative of the 15 identity of a respective write means (2) and event data (102) indicative of an event associated with the respective write means (2).
3. A record carrier according to claim 2 wherein said 20 event data (102) is representative of a numerical value.
4. A record carrier according to claim 3 wherein the event data (102) for each identified write means (2) is stored as a total numerical value for said each identified 25 write means.
5. A record carrier according to claim 4 wherein the event data (102) for all of the identified write means (2) is stored in said storage area as a total separately from 30 said event data for each identified write means.
6. A record carrier according to any preceding claim wherein said data further comprises record carrier identifying data, distinctive of the record carrier.

7. A record carrier according to any preceding claim which is of substantially credit-card dimensions.

8. A record carrier according to claim 7 wherein data are 5 stored on magnetic tracks.

9. An arrangement for writing data to a non visibly readable record carrier (1) comprising means (22) for providing identifying data indicative of the said 10 arrangement, means (27) for providing event data representative of an event associated with said arrangement and write means (21) for writing a data portion (101, 102) including said identifying data (101) and said event data (102) to said record carrier (1) such that the data portion 15 indicates the event data and the arrangement writing said data portion.

10. An arrangement according to claim 9 wherein said write means (21) writes said data portion to said record carrier 20 (1) one or more times.

11. An arrangement according to claim 10 wherein said event data (102) is representative of a numerical value.

25 12. An arrangement according to claim 11 further comprising a record carrier reader (21) for providing read data corresponding to data stored on an associated record carrier (1), and a detector (22) for evaluating said read data, the output of the detector controlling the write 30 means (21).

13. An arrangement according to claim 12 wherein said detector (22) determines the total numerical value of all 35 previously stored event data on said record carrier (1) and provides a control signal for inhibiting said write means

(21) if the total value exceeds a predetermined value.

14. An arrangement according to claims 12 or 13 wherein said detector (22) detects the number of previously stored 5 data portions on said recorder carrier (1) and provides a control signal for inhibiting said write means if said number exceeds a predetermined number.

15. An arrangement according to claim 14 wherein said 10 detector (22) detects previously stored identifying data in said read data, and said arrangement further comprises comparison means (22) for comparing said previously stored identifying data (101) with said identifying data indicative of the arrangement of concern, whereby if no 15 previously stored data portion includes identifying data indicative of said arrangement, then said write means (21) writes a new data portion to said record carrier, said new data portion comprising identifying data (101) indicative of said arrangement and event data associated with said 20 arrangement.

16. An arrangement according to claim 14 wherein the detector (22) is arranged to detect previously stored event data of said previously stored data portions and if a 25 stored data portion (101, 102) includes identifying data indicative of said arrangement, the said write means writes a data total representative of the sum of:

(a) the numerical value of event data (102) 30 representative of said event associated with said arrangement; and
(b) the numerical value of said previously stored event data representative of previous events associated with said arrangement to that portion in place of said previously stored event data whereby 35 said event data is updated.

17. An arrangement according to any of claims 10 to 16 further comprising means (22) for determining the number of data portions to be written to said record carrier (1), and 5 control means (22) responsive to the said number for controlling said write means (21) whereby said number of times of writing said data portions (101, 102) depends on the number of data portions (101, 102).

10 18. An arrangement according to claim 17 wherein means (21, 22) are provided for writing afresh previously stored data portions (101, 102) and, if applicable, a new data portion (101, 102) to said record carrier (2) whereby data portions representative of data having higher numerical 15 values of event data are presented for reading before data portions having lower numerical values of event data.

19. An arrangement according to claim 18 having discriminator means (22) for discrimination of data 20 portions to be written to said record carrier (1) into first data portions having identifying data exhibiting a first characteristic and second said data portions having identifying data exhibiting a second characteristic and format control means (22), responsive to the total number 25 of data portions to be written to said recorder carrier (1) and operable if the total number of data portions exceeds a predetermined threshold to cause said write means to write to said record carrier only event data from a first said data portion, and to write to said record carrier said 30 second data portions including identifying data and event data.

20. An arrangement according to any one of claims 9 to 18 wherein means (22) are provided for writing said event data 35 associated with said arrangement to memory means (23)

associated with said arrangement substantially contemporaneously with writing said data to said record carrier.

5 21. An arrangement according to any of claims 9-20 wherein a keyboard (25) is provided for input of said event data (102) to said arrangement.

10 22. An arrangement as in any of claims 9-21 wherein said record carrier (1) is of substantially credit card dimension.

15 23. An arrangement as in claim 22 wherein data are stored in magnetic tracks on said record carrier (1).

24. An arrangement for accessing a record carrier, having means (22) for providing identifying data (101) representative of the said arrangement, means (22) for providing event data (102) representative of a numerical value, record carrier reader means (21) for providing read data corresponding to data previously stored on said record carrier, write means (21) for writing to said record carrier data comprising a data portion including said identifying data (101) and said event data (102), such that the data portion indicates the event data and the arrangement writing said data portion, and processor means (22) responsive to said read data for controlling said write means (21) to write said data portion as a new data portion if said read data does not include a data portion having identifying data representative of the said arrangement.

25. An arrangement according to claim 24 wherein said write means (21) is controllable by said processor means (22) to write said data portion to said record carrier one

or more times.

26. An arrangement according to claim 25 wherein said processor means (22) determines the number of times to 5 write said data portion (101, 102) in dependence upon the number of previously stored data portions found in said read data.

27. A reader for a record carrier embodying data input by 10 one or more write means (2), said data comprising identifying data (101) representative of said write means and event data (102) indicative of an event recorded by said write means (2), said reader including means (501) for reading said identifying data, means (501) for reading said 15 event data and means (503) for correlating said identifying data and event data associated therewith.

28. A reader according to claim 27 further comprising means (503) for storing said correlated identifying data 20 and event data.

29. A reader according to claims 27 or 28 further comprising data communication means (504) for transmitting said correlated identifying and event data to data 25 processor means (6).

30. A data information system comprising two or more record carrier write means (21), each record carrier write means (21) being adapted to write identifying data (101) 30 representative of each said record carrier write means and event data (102) indicative of an event onto a record carrier (1) provided in operation, and record carrier read means (5) for evaluating from said record carrier said identifying data (101) and said event data (102). ~

31. A method of conveying data information utilising a plurality of read-write arrangements (2), each comprising means (22) for providing identifying data (101) indicative of the respective read-write arrangement, means (22) for 5 providing event data (102) to the respective read-write arrangement, said event data (102) being indicative of an event associated with the respective arrangement and at least one record carrier evaluator (5), comprising the steps of:

10 (a) providing at least one record carrier (1);
(b) bringing said record carrier into co-operation with a respective read-write arrangement (2);

15 (c) writing (21) a data portion to said record carrier (1), said data portion comprising said identifying data (101) and said event data (102);

(d) bringing said record carrier (1) into co-operation with a record carrier evaluator (5);

20 (e) evaluating data written to said record carrier (1); and

(f) correlating said identifying data (101) with said event data (102) so as to identify the read/write arrangement (2) to which said event was associated.

25 32. A method of conveying data information according to claim 31 wherein step (c) comprises writing (21) said data portion one or more times.

33. A method of conveying data information according to 30 claim 32 in which step (b) further comprises:

1. reading (21) said record carrier (1);
2. determining (22) whether said carrier (1) embodies previous data portions comprising identifying data (101) indicative of a read/write arrangement (2);

3. storing each said previous data portion (101, 102) in said read/write arrangement (22); and

4. step (c) further comprises writing (21) afresh said stored data portions to said record
5 carrier.

34. A method of conveying data information according to claim 33 further comprising the steps of:

10 counting (22) the number of data portions (101, 102) to be written to a record carrier (1) and in dependence thereon, controlling said number of times of writing (21) said data portion.

35. A method of conveying data information according to
15 claim 34 wherein if said counted number of data portions is below a first threshold, said write means (21) is controlled to write (2) said data portions twice, and if said counted number is above said first threshold, said write means (21) is controlled to write said data portion
20 (101, 102) once.

36. A method of conveying data information according to claim 34 or 35 further comprising the steps of:

25 discriminating (22) the data portions to be written to said record carrier into first data portions having identifying data (10) exhibiting a first characteristic and second data portions having identifying data (101) exhibiting a second characteristic; and

30 in dependence on the counted number of data portions to be written to a record carrier, writing (21) said second data portions to said record carrier and, from a first data portion, writing only event data (102) to said record carrier.

37. A method of conveying data information according to claim 36 in which said event data (102) represents a numerical value and in step (e) data portions (101, 102) are written (21) to said record carrier (1) with data 5 portions representing numerical values of event data of higher value being presented on said record carrier (1) before said portions representing lower numerical value.

38. A method of conveying data information as in any one 10 of claims 31-37 wherein each said record carrier (1) is a magnetic-stripe card.

39. A reader substantially as herein described with reference to and as illustrated in Figure 4 of the 15 accompanying drawings.

40. A data information system as herein described with reference to and as shown in the accompanying drawings.

20 41. A method of conveying data information substantially as described with reference to and as shown in the accompanying drawings.

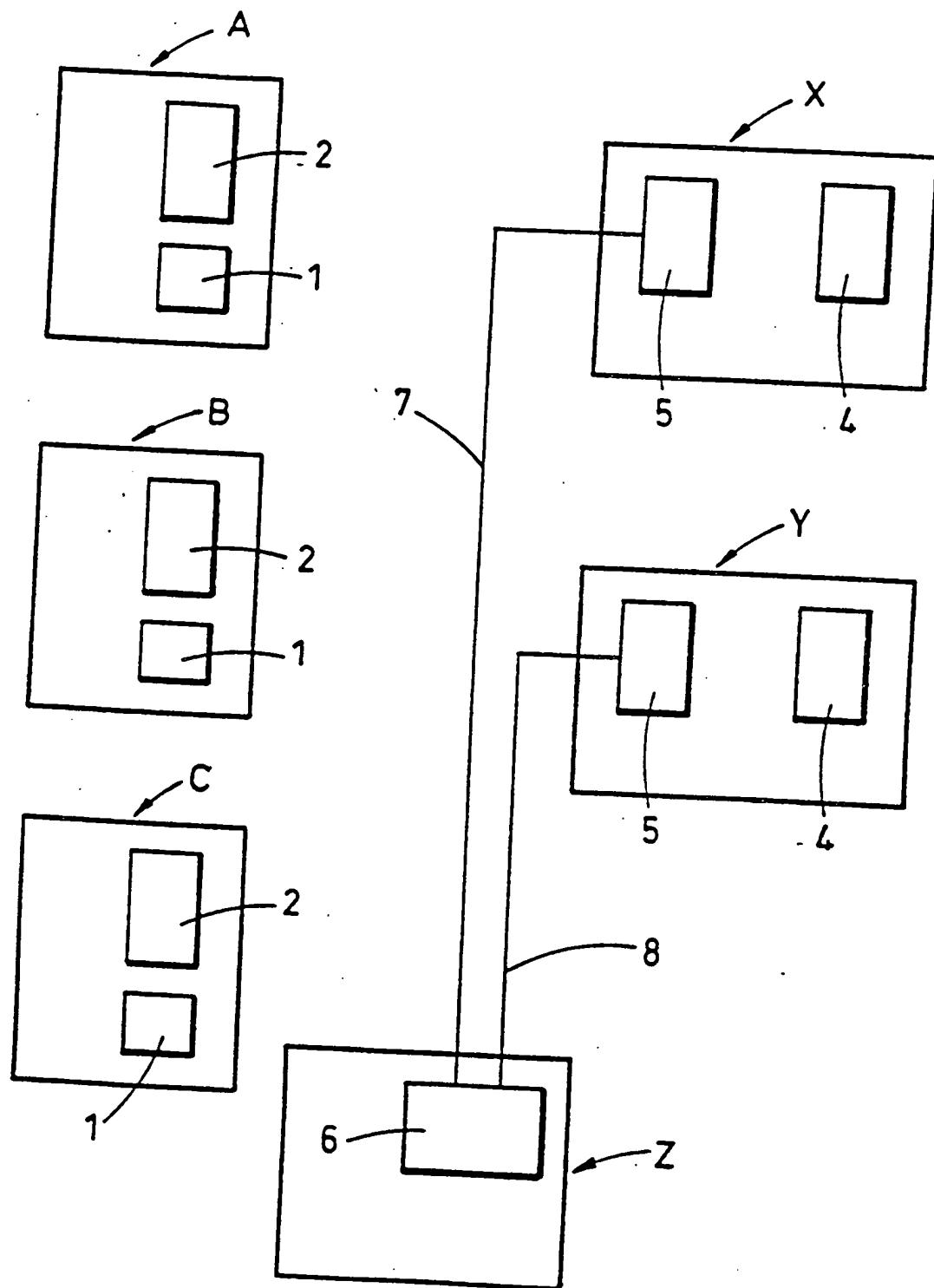


Fig. 1

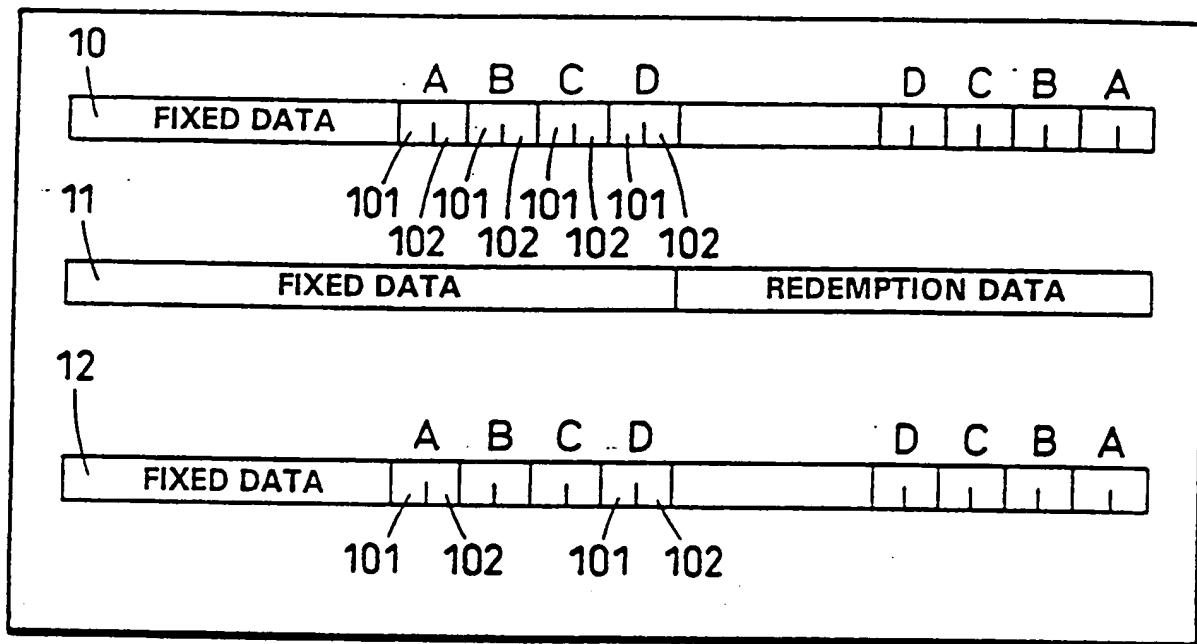


Fig. 2(a)

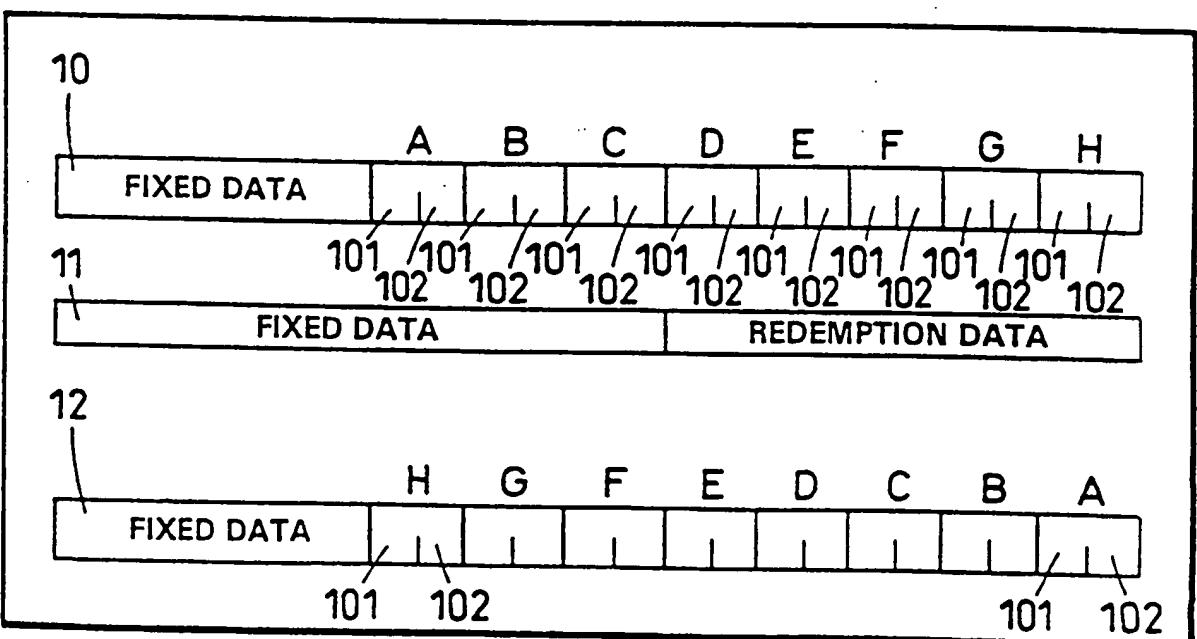


Fig. 2(b)

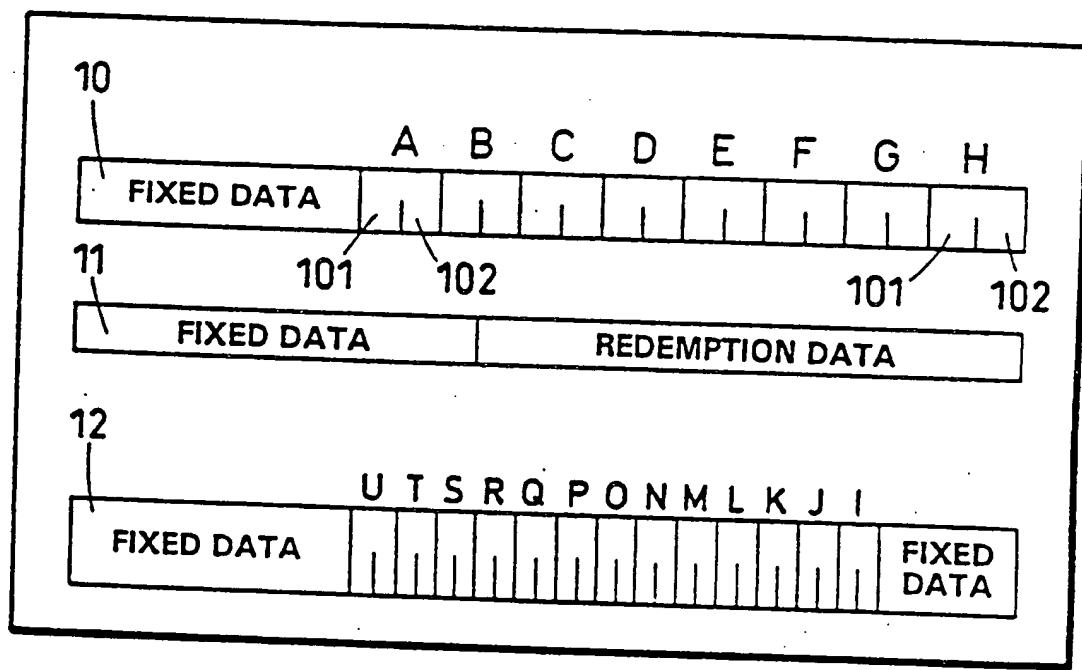


Fig.2(c)

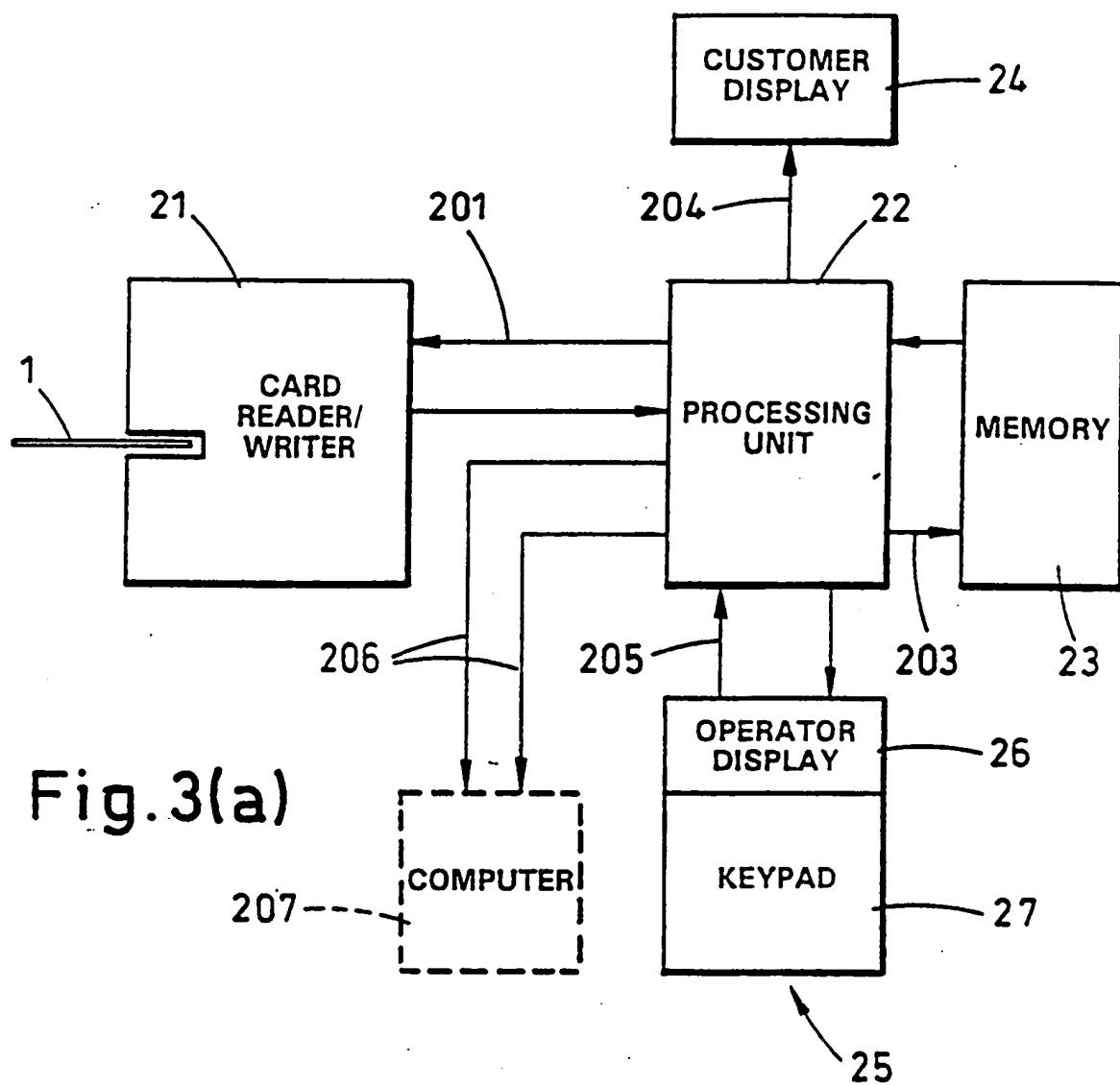


Fig.3(a)

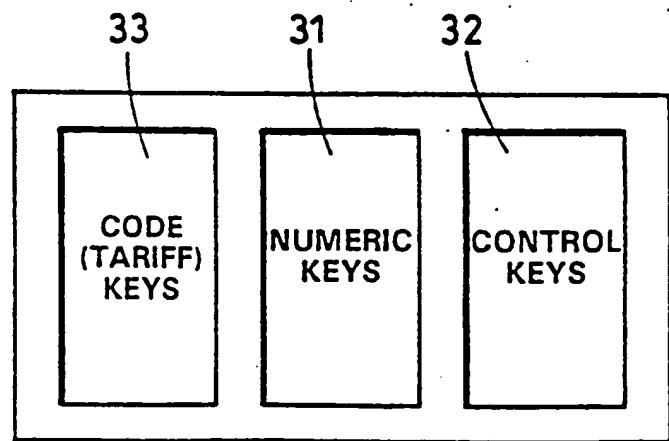


Fig. 3(b)

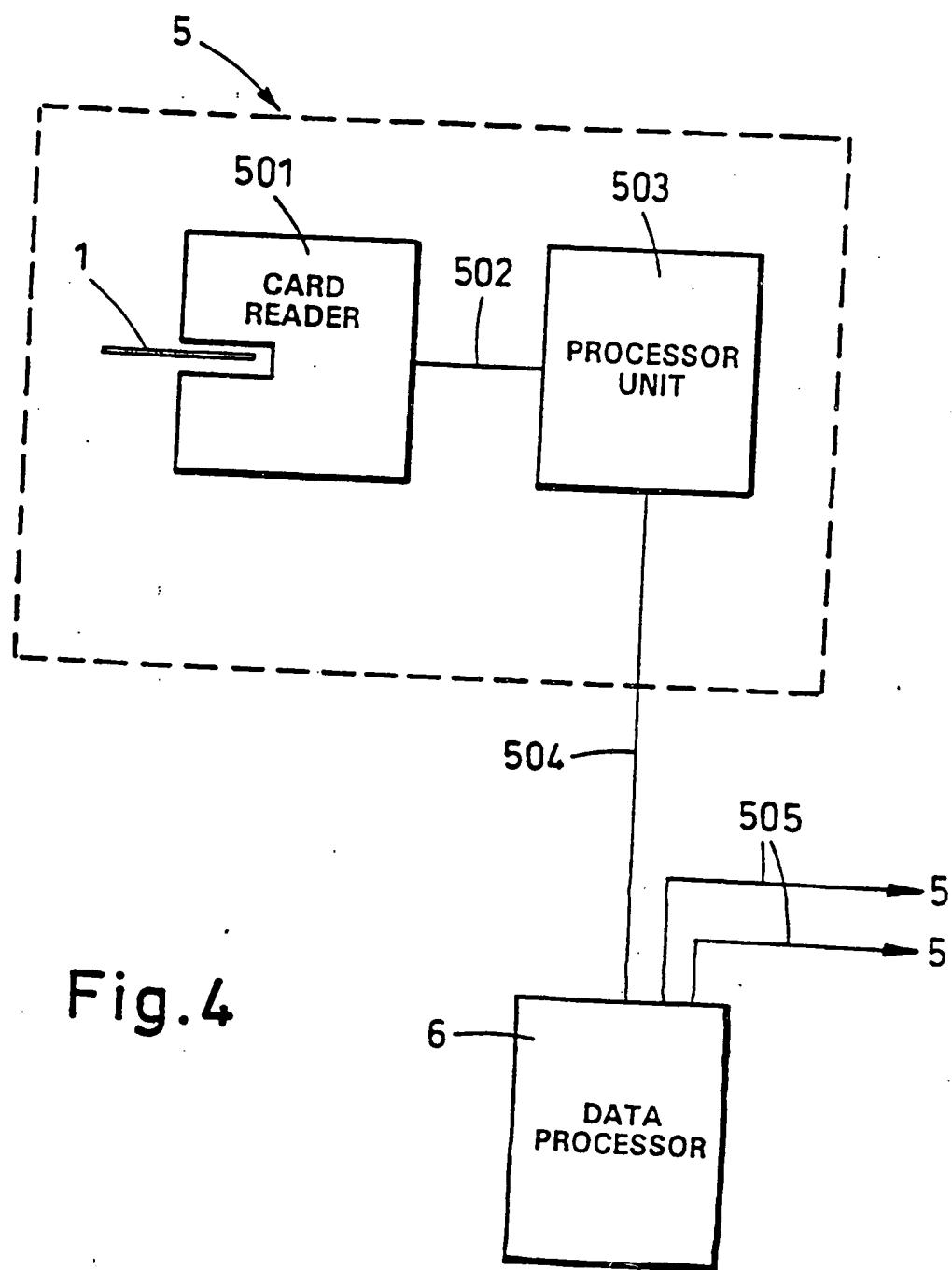


Fig.4

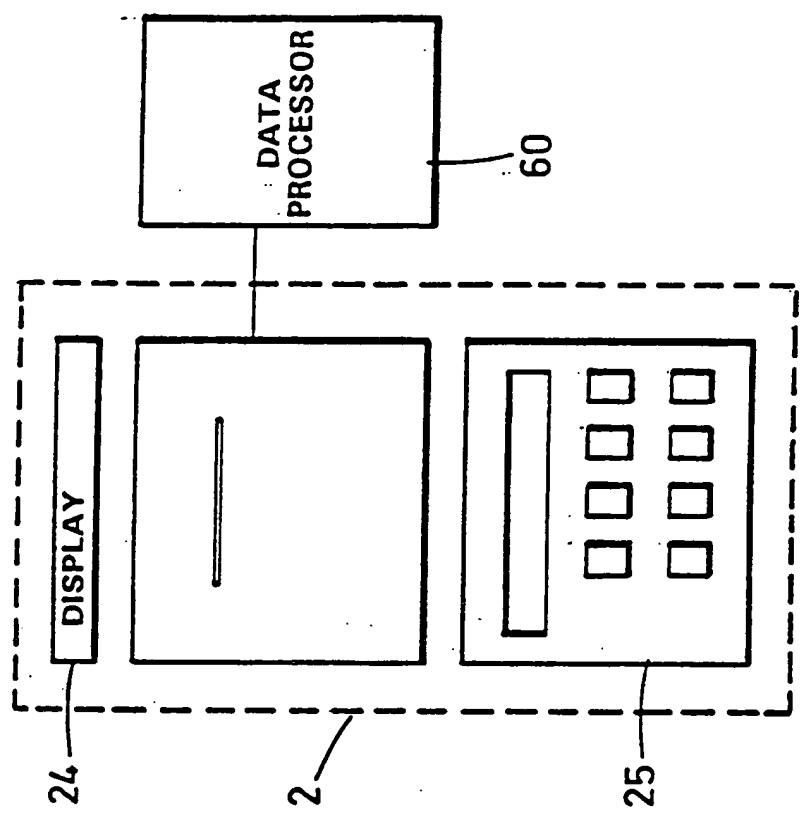


Fig. 6

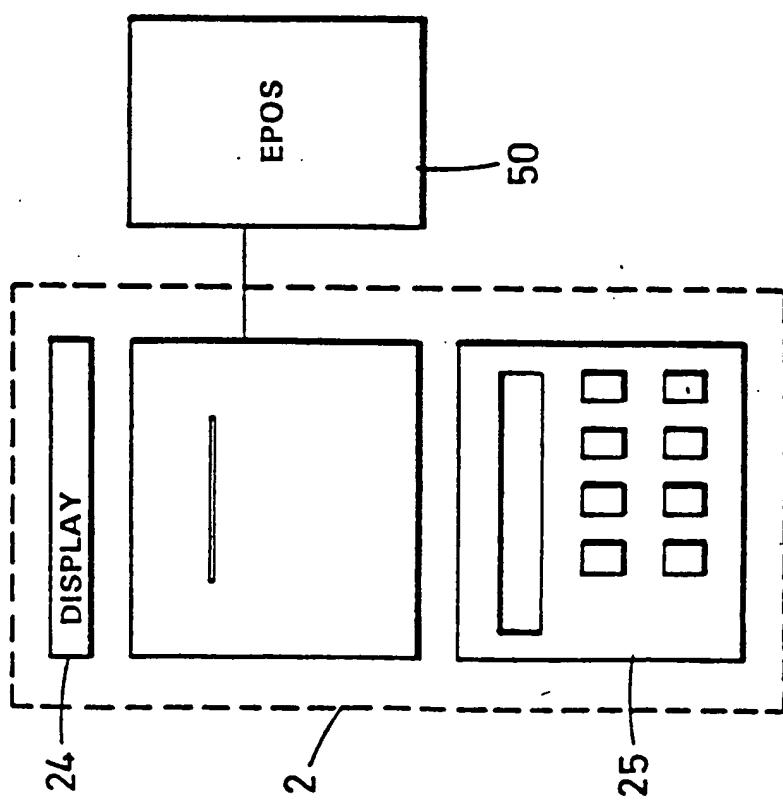
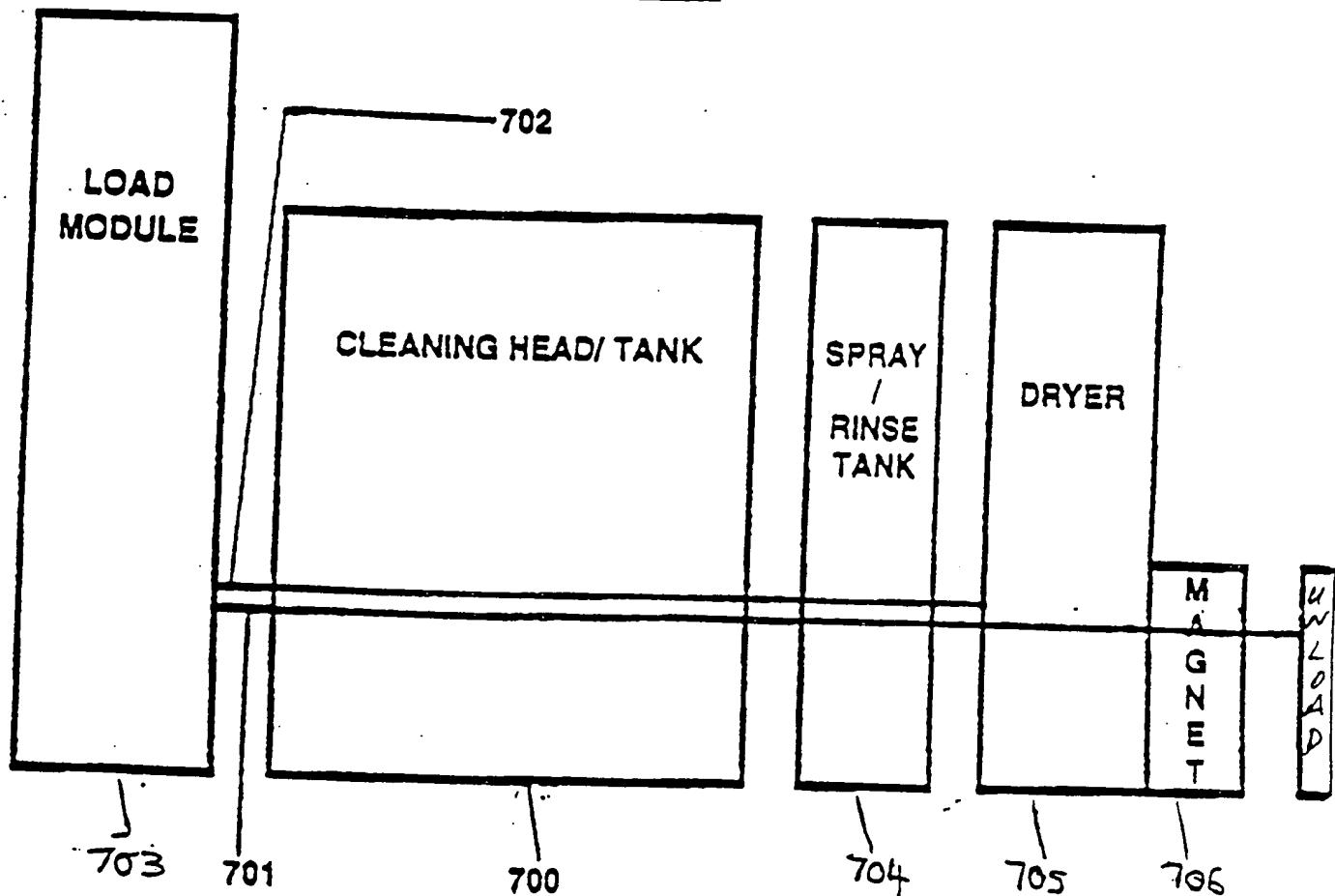


Fig. 5

FIG. 7

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/GB 93/02103

I. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER (If several classification symbols apply, indicate all) *

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both National Classification and IPC
 5 G 07 F 7/10
 IPC:

II. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum Documentation Searched *

Classification System	Classification Symbols
IPC ⁵	G 07 F 7/00, G 07 F 19/00

Documentation Searched other than Minimum Documentation
 to the Extent that such Documents are Included in the Fields Searched *

III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT*

Category *	Citation of Document, ** with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages ***	Relevant to Claim No. **
Y	DE, A1, 3 911 667 (ROBERT BOSCH GMBH) 11 October 1990 (11.10.90), claims 1,3; fig. 1.	1-5, 9, 11-13
A	Claims 1,3; fig. 1.	6, 10, 21, 34, 36

Y	DE, A1, 3 620 755 (ROBERT BOSCH GMBH) 23 December 1987 (23.12.87), claims 3,5.	1-5, 9, 11-13
A	Claims 3,5.	14-18, 20, 27, 28, 31, 35

A	EP, A2, 0 202 473 (SONY CORPORATION) 26 November 1986 (26.11.86), column 5, lines 9-13.	1, 25, 26, 29, 30, 32, 33, 36, 38

* Special categories of cited documents: **

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the International filing date

"L" document which may throw doubt on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the International filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the International filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"Z" document member of the same patent family

IV. CERTIFICATION

Date of the Actual Completion of the International Search
 16 December 1993

Date of Mailing of this International Search Report

12. 01. 94

ANHANG

zur internationalen Recherchenbericht über die internationale Patentanmeldung Nr.

In diesem Anhang sind die Mitglieder der Patentfamilien der im obengenannten internationalen Recherchenbericht angeführten Patentdokumente angegeben. Diese Angaben dienen nur zur Unter-richtung und erfolgen ohne Gewähr.

ANNEX

to the International Search Report to the International Patent Application No.

PCT/GB 93/02103 SAE 80408

This Annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are given merely for the purpose of information.

ANNEXE

au rapport de recherche international relatif à la demande de brevet international n°

La présente annexe indique les membres de la famille de brevets relatifs aux documents de brevets cités dans le rapport de recherche international visé ci-dessus. Les renseignements fournis sont donnés à titre indicatif et n'engagent pas la responsabilité de l'Office.

Im Recherchenbericht angeführtes Patentdokument Patent document cited in search report Document de brevet cité dans le rapport de recherche	Datum der Veröffentlichung Publication date Date de publication	Mitglied(er) der Patentfamilie Patent family member(s) Membre(s) de la famille de brevets	Datum der Veröffentlichung Publication date Date de publication
DE A1 3911667	11-10-90	keine - none - rien	
DE A1 3620755	23-12-87	keine - none - rien	
EP A2 202473	26-11-86	AU A1 56132/86 AU B2 585599 CA A1 1263478 DE CO 3685855 DE T2 3685855 EP A3 202473 EP B1 202473 JP A2 61242861 US A 4877946	23-10-86 22-06-89 28-11-89 06-08-92 25-02-93 02-03-88 01-07-92 29-10-86 31-10-89

